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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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Echoes

THE NATIONAL HEALTH SURVEY*

SCOPE AND METHOD OF THE NATION-WIDE CANVASS OF SICKNESS IN RELATION TO ITS SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SETTING

By GEORGE ST. J. PERROTT, *Principal Statistician*, CLARK TIBBITTS, *Field Director*,
and ROLLO H. BRITTEN, *Senior Statistician, United States Public Health Service*

During the winter of 1935-36 the United States Public Health Service inquired into the state of the Nation's health and underlying social and economic factors by means of a house-to-house canvass of over 700,000 households in urban communities in 18 States¹ and 37,000 households in rural areas in 3 States. The present paper sets forth the purpose and scope of the survey, outlines in some detail the method of sampling and canvassing, compares various aspects of the population with 1930 Census data as a rough measure of the reliability of the Health Survey sample, and records the major definitions employed in the survey. Subsequent papers to be published in the PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS or as special monographs will present the detailed findings.

SCOPE OF THE SURVEY

The data necessary for comprehensive analysis of national health problems are not available from regularly compiled records. Local, State, and Federal health agencies collect information principally on births, deaths, and a limited list of incompletely reported communicable diseases. On the frequency of accidents and disabilities resulting therefrom, only approximate estimates based on records of insurance companies, workmen's compensation commissions, and industrial and safety organizations have been available. As to the provision of medical care, records of doctors, hospitals, and health agencies lack the uniformity and centralization necessary for statistical comparisons. Any adequate picture of care received in relation to needs can be obtained only through family reporting.

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The goal and scope of the 1935-36 National Health Survey of the Public Health Service were defined by George St. J. Perrott, Clark Tibbitts, and Rollo H. Britten in this article which also outlined survey methods and techniques.